

CIA/OSR /MEMO RA 750130

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SECRET/SENSITIVE--SOVIET SUPPORT TO SYRIA; THE QUESTION OF
PREPOSITIONED EQUIPMENT

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30 January 1975

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Soviet Support to Syria; The Question
of Prepositioned Equipment

1. Since the October 1973 war, there have been numerous reports that equipment intended for use by Soviet forces has been prepositioned in Syria. We have studied these reports and have tried to verify their claims. On the basis of this all-source review, we conclude that the Soviets have not prepositioned equipment in Syria for their own use nor are they now in the process of doing so. We believe that most of the Soviet arms including tanks, APCs, artillery, aircraft, and SAMs delivered since the war have been integrated into Syrian units.

The Evidence

2. There are a number of large concentrations of vehicles at Al Quatayfah, about 15 miles northeast of Damascus. Within these concentrations there usually are some 400 tanks, 200 tank transporters, about 200 APCs, and over 1,000 trucks. On occasion, the truck count has been as high as 2,000. These concentrations have contributed to much of the speculation regarding the possibility of prepositioned Soviet equipment.

3. It is our judgment that Al Quatayfah is used by the Syrians as a vehicle pool.

This memorandum was prepared in the Office of Strategic Research. Queries and comments may be addressed to [redacted] extension 6636.

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About 150 of the tanks appear to be salvaged equipment which is being repaired or cannabilized. Also, many of the tanks are obsolete T-34s which are no longer found in Soviet combat units.

4. If the Soviets were to man the ground force equipment now at Al Quatayfah, they would not have enough to create a maneuver force with any significant combat capability. The number of tanks and armored personnel carriers is about equivalent to only one Soviet tank division. The rest of the equipment consists primarily of trucks. Virtually all of the necessary combat-support equipment would still have to be delivered.

5. For the Soviets to have a major ground combat capability in Syria, many additional tank and motorized rifle divisions would be required--probably two combined arms armies consisting of about six tank and four motorized rifle divisions plus support--and considerable tactical air and air defense elements. To get all this equipment into Syria, the Soviets would have to mobilize and assemble more shipping than is normally available in the Black Sea. It would take at a minimum two to three months to do this.

Soviet Presence in Syria

6. Since the October war, the number of Soviet military personnel in Syria has risen by several hundred to an estimated total of at least 2,000 men. These Soviets are involved in training Syrian pilots and advising ground forces down to the battalion level. The only Soviet combat unit currently identified in Syria is an SA-6 regiment located near Damascus. The unit accounts for about 500 of the Soviet personnel in the country and consists of five firing batteries of four transporter-erector launchers (TEs) each.

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